

Cool Tools Session Reflections

Screencast-o-matic

Web-based screen capture and video recording

Ideal for:

- Flipped classroom, or pre-teach lessons,
- Distance learning, providing in a learning management system (like Moodle),
- Step-by-step instructions for learning a task,
- Capturing presentation video and slideshow simultaneously.

Features:

- Easy to use,
- Provides options for uploading, sharing, or saving locally,
- Embedded features for cursor following,
- More features for \$15 year, including unlimited time, annotations, and removal of the logo watermark.

Challenges:

- Requires a desktop or laptop computer,
- Content takes time to encode before playback.

Screencast-O-Matic supports screen and webcam capture in an affordable and useful medium. More expensive tools and apps have produced similar results, but the easy and inexpensive format reaches audience better.

I believe this tool would be a fantastic way to communicate with distance audiences in multitude of formats. In a Khan Academy type of method, “whiteboard” instruction and virtual tours of content can be

Mindmeister

A cloud-based, mind mapping tool for diagramming the thought or design process

Ideal for:

- curriculum design,
- research planning,
- writing diagrams,
- notetaking,
- storyboarding.

Features:

- pop-up notes, attached links and files,
- create and assign tasks and Timeline (history) tool that provides timestamp of revisions,
- custom theses (templates and self-created),
- Prezi-like presentation mode and Google Docs viewer embedded,
- HTML5 compatible and a free mobile app,
- Social network support.

Challenges:

- limited options in Basic account, requires subscription for multiple-users (collaborative work)
- Some Undo steps do not work well when collaborating

I believe that MindMeister has a great advantage over many other concept mapping tools resulting from several innovative features. The Timeline feature allows all users to see a visual progression of revision over time, that provides a tremendous asset to discussing understanding.

iMapBook

Online texts with embedded games

Ideal for:

- Motivating reading

Features:

- Multiple texts that can be used
- Requires students to complete games to continue learning

Challenges:

- Currently in beta, many errors and inconsistencies,
- Only compatible with one web browser, limiting use,
- Requires instruction on how to interact with the games, not intuitive.

I believe this tool would help motivate students to participate in conversations around what they read and excite them to complete the next section of a reading.

The layout and formatting of the text is somewhat confusing. Section 508 compliance could be a concern because the formatting may not be accessible by a screen reader. Mozilla Firefox appears to be the only web browser that is able to utilize the features provided.

The tool progresses in difficulty, from recall of facts, to inference as it moves along. The variety of activities provides scaffolding for reading comprehension of the chapter in the book. The color-coded texts are very helpful for practicing the parts of speech.

Google Sites

The webpage component of the Google Apps

Ideal for:

- Designing a robust website,
- Allows for secure and efficient resources both publically or privately,
- A landing site for curated resources and app tools

Features:

- Dynamic content including embedded apps,
- Free to setup and host, with templates and design ideas pre-designed,
- Can be used securely, with user management options.

Challenges:

- Requires a Google account to participate, some institutions block this site,
- Connecting to a domain can be challenging and time consuming,
- Dashboard interface is not as intuitive as WordPress and other web design applications.

Google Sites supports web design with an efficient interface and the inclusion of dynamic tools. Users can create individual pages and network them together to share content. With the incorporation of other Google Apps (Drive, Youtube), content can be added quickly and shared with specific users.

All pages are scalable and compatible with nearly all devices.

Codecademy

Instructional site for coding

Ideal for:

- Teaching digital literacy and programming
- Connects the science of coding to learners of all expertise
- Creating web and standalone apps and programs that fits the needs of the curriculum

Features:

- Web and mobile based instruction,
- Plug-and-play coding courses in the browser,
- Provides on- and offline curriculum,
- Dashboard data for the progress of students.

Challenges

- Requires a desktop or laptop to use the incorporated compiler,
- Instruction requires patience and an understanding of the methodology.

Codecademy provides opportunities for programming instruction for all ages and levels of understanding in a fashion that is very friendly to new users. The site provides well-organized curriculum that will aid instructors in the design of lessons and units. The progress monitoring tools are very helpful for instructors as well as students.

The format includes instruction on the left and a live terminal on the right side. When the code is completed, it is executed by a real machine and made accessible within the browser. The Roadmaps feature allows linking to other readings or codes that can be beneficial to the learner.

Columbia University students created the tool and wanted to make coding available for all.

Storify, Popcorn, and Meograph

Collection and mixing of multiple medias

Ideal for:

- Synthesizing information from multiple resources
- Create dynamic content that connects the audience to specific ideas or media

Features:

- Multiple texts that can be used
- Requires students to complete games to continue learning
- **Storify** allows sequencing of content but not editing or layering of content. You can, however generate text to add between bits of content. It plays back like a feed, or a slideshow with interactive links.
- **Meograph** allows sequencing of content but not editing of content. You can layer content in a formatted way (location, time, annotations, and narration). You can record narration. It plays through like a movie with interactive live links and features.
- **Popcorn Maker** allows sequencing of content, editing of content, and robust unlimited layering of content. It plays like a video with interactive links and live features (i.e. Google Maps)

Challenges:

- Each site requires an account (or access to an account at a social media site) and may be blocked in some institutions,
- Some of the interfaces are difficult to learn for incorporating specific tasks,
- Content should be reviewed carefully before publication.

Each tools has strengths and challenges, but all of intuitive interfaces that allow for embedding media and sharing with ease. The ability to have students crafting a portfolio of digital experiences or conversations are incredibly useful.